

18 April 1951

The Honorable Brien McMahon  
Chairman  
Joint Committee on Atomic Energy  
Congress of the United States  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in reference to my letter to you of February 1, 1951, in which the Central Intelligence Agency undertook the responsibility of preparing an estimate on Soviet capabilities to counter the delivery of United States atomic weapons. I am distressed by the delay which has occurred in informing you finally on this matter. However, as you will note from the attached letter of the Secretary of Defense, dated 17 April 1951, both this delay and our inability to produce the estimate you requested are due to circumstances beyond the control of this Agency.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely,

OSD REVIEW COMPLETED

JCS review(s) completed.

Walter B. Smith  
Director

*Dispatched by hand  
Mr. Pforzheimer  
20 Apr 51.*

Enclosure

O/DCI LBK:mlk

WBS:c

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
Washington

17 April 1951

Dear Smith:

Your memorandum of 5 February, based on a request from Senator McMahon, suggests that the Weapons Systems Evaluation Group participate with the Central Intelligence Agency in preparing a comprehensive estimate on Soviet capabilities "to impair, prevent, or frustrate the delivery of atomic weapons to targets inside the USSR". The subject has been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the light of a related memorandum from Senator McMahon requesting certain information concerning our atomic weapons, our ability to deliver them, the selection of targets, our atomic missile development, and other details.

I understand that the Joint Chiefs of Staff agencies have been working on appropriate studies and estimates on these two related requests. The preparation of both estimates involves a detailed examination of current United States war plans, and an analysis of our capabilities to carry out such war plans.

It is the opinion of the Joint Chiefs, in which I concur, that the dangers inherent in dissemination of information on the first subject are equally as compelling as those on the second, and fall within the scope of my letter of 2 April to Senator McMahon. (copy attached)

On the basis of the foregoing, I do not believe it feasible to authorize Department of Defense participation in the project requested by Senator McMahon.

Faithfully yours,

General W. B. Smith  
Director, Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D.C.

S/ H. C. Marshall

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
Washington

Apr 2 1951

Dear Senator McMahon:

I refer to your memorandum, 12 February 1951, in which request is made for certain information concerning our atomic weapons, our ability to deliver them, the selection of targets, our atomic missile development, and other details,

Most careful consideration has been given to a series of possible answers to the questions presented by you and, after consultation by the President with me and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it has been decided that there is no practicable way in which this type of information can be made available without serious risk to our national security.

No question as to the integrity of anyone concerned in this matter has arisen. The risk to our national security arises from the fact that answers to the questions propounded cannot be complete in themselves; that is they can serve only to develop further fields for examination. Thus the ultimate result could only be a complete briefing of our most secret war plans including all the information upon which they are based.

Those mentioned above are unanimously of the opinion that this type of information must be held secret by the President, in his capacity as Commander in Chief, and his immediate subordinates. I believe that when you consider this matter from this point of view you will understand our reticence and agree with the conclusions reached.

Faithfully yours,

/s/ G. C. Marshall

Honorable Brien McMahon  
Chairman, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy  
United States Senate.

93

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